

# 2009-06-15 Emotions Anger Part 2

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anger, angry, people, express, emotions, mindfulness, act, caught, buddhist, unhealthy, buddhists, buddhist practice, hostility, investigate, mind, mindfulness practice, afraid, fear, resentment, interested

## SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsdal

I think I haven't been here for a couple of Monday's. Right? someone knows. And feels a little bit awkward because last time I was here, I gave a talk on anger, which is meant to be part of a series of talks on emotions and practice of mindfulness around emotions. And then I finished the talk on anger, I thought, well, I have more to say more more to explore on anger. So that will, I think I might even said next week we'll talk more about anger. But now it's two Three weeks later. And one fulfill my promise. But it seems kind of distant. The first talk on anger now. So

anger is a variable Interesting emotion. Because in Buddhist circles, because in Buddhist circles, anger often gets a bad rap, or it has a bad reputation. And Buddhists are supposed to be kind, compassionate, peaceful economists, non reactive, non attached all these wonderful qualities. And so then you shouldn't be angry. And so then what happens some in some Buddhist circles is that anger grows underground in Buddhist culture, because you're not supposed to express that you're not supposed to be angry. So it becomes kind of a sometimes a shadow of Buddhist groups, and which is often the case whenever there's an ideal. People don't want to kind of don't want to express the opposite of the ideal and so they can Have that side of them kind of gets pushed off or ignored or not paid attention to or not acted on or not expressed or not admitted. And I think it's inevitable that any culture that has an ideal which I suppose any culture is going to have a shadow side around that ideal that we don't want to look at or notice so much because and it's, it's the function of a practice, or spiritual practice of mindfulness practice, to help bring the what's in the shadow out into the light. So it's not that not a fault of any culture to have a shadow. It just comes with the territory, it comes with any culture. And but one of the one of the important functions of meditation practice or mindfulness practice, is to help draw that out and show it to us. So we can take that into account and be wise about it, as opposed to leaving it there. So in that regard, I think it's often good for Buddhists to take Take a look at anger. Now one of the first interesting Buddhist approaches to anger is to notice when anger has the upper hand, and when we have the upper hand. So even before any judgments about whether you should be angry or fingers, good or bad or whatever, who's in charge of you? Is your anger in charge of you or, you know, are you in charge. And so, if, if somehow you're being pushed around by the anger, the anger is creating a very powerful filter through which you're interpreting your world inaccurately, or a very powerful fuel for motivations which are not healthy. Or the anger even if anger is appropriate anger and the motivation for the anger is good. You really need scripts. It's really, you don't have any real control over is pushing you along and you've acting it out, sometimes with the belief that you're in charge. But you're not really. And one of the great ways to find out who's in charge is to meditate. Because you sit down to meditate and you want to look at, try to hold your mind, mindfully present in the present moment, for example, keep it present on your breathing. And you find that you can't do it. Because the mind has a mind of its own. The mind has very strong agendas and concerns, preoccupations, that takes you away and you sit down to meditate. And the anger, for example, comes

back with a vengeance. And you spent 15 minutes of meditation period, or 45 minutes of meditation period, rehearsing the situation, planning, your actions, what you're going to do, thinking about it, all that and, you know, as far as you could tell you didn't breathe at all during the whole 45 minutes? Isn't, you know you haven't you have no evidence of it since you weren't paying attention. So that's a good so you find out the meditation is one of the great values of meditation is to notice what the preoccupations of the mind are the unresolved issues of the mind. And really, are you in the grips of those concerns? Or are you free of them, it's fine to have concerns and to engage in them and reflect on them. But a free person was free should be able to put them down freely, when it's appropriate, and pick them up when it's appropriate.

So so then we become interested in exploring this topic of who's in charge. And, and the one of the great. One of the things we're trying to do when we do mindfulness practice is to let mindfulness be in the forefront mindfulness, or investigation or curiosity interest. What is that Guess what's going on here? Let me notice more carefully what's happening. So with anger, if we're able to step back from the anger, and ask ourselves what is this and get interest, it's our looking, then we're doing mindfulness, if we can step back, but we stay in the fray, you know, to keep thinking about it and thinking about it and kind of keep getting lost in the thoughts and concerns and the feelings. Then, you know, the minds interest stays with, stays interested with the topic that we're angry about or the situation or the people. But if we, so without judging, the anger is being bad or wrong or anything. The switch in mindfulness is to switch from living in the anger being involved in the anger, to investigating the anger, being mindful of the anger and that switch is a very significant switch in the mind the neurologists say that it's a different function in the mind, that's operating. When we're in kind of caught up and boiling in anger, versus we're kind of, you know, investigating and watching and being mindful of it. And is that functioning of the mind that can watch and see that we're trying to develop when we're doing mindfulness practice, because it gives us much more freedom in how we're going to live our life. It also gives us much more wisdom because we can see more clearly as a result. So then, in mindfulness, we become interested to explore what anger is to investigate it. And what I said I think two weeks ago, is that anger is deserves investigation because anger is not a single thing. It's not like just anger that's done with you know, understanding. Anger is a kind of umbrella term, under which we include a lot of different emotions. And sometimes it's contemporary The strong displeasure it can be a fierce, protective No. Sometimes it can be an act of hostility, animosity. And there's a big range. There's a huge difference between a strong expression of displeasure which I think is really appropriate Some things are very unpleasant or a strong fear saying no. without, you know on one hand versus hatred, hostility and animosity on the other and generally in Buddhist English, this will save you a lot of problems and as you negotiate Buddhist English when Buddhists use it in English when Buddhists use the word anger you should probably this translated in your mind To mean the kind of anger that is hostile, that has an amount animosity and if you know of a kind of anger that has no hostility, no hate, no animosity, no ill will in it, then probably the Buddhists aren't talking about that. Unless you're caught by it, you're caught by it, then we want to become free of it. But we don't we don't make a negative negative evaluation of what's bad. What's bad or Buddhist language? What's unhealthy? Is the kind of anger that is, has hostility in it. So then a lot of the statements that Buddhists make about anger that can seem like negative judgments of anger, make much more sense if remember, they're talking about hostility, if that makes sense, is helpful. And so how are there other forms of anger? You know, that's up to you to decide. What's your strongest Pleasure especially it can just go to still it could be sometimes called anger. One of the interesting things about most forms of anger is it seems that it's primarily a social emotion meaning that it arises in social settings. Sometimes you can be angry with nature. You know, that tree just fell in my car.

You know, it's gonna happen that way. But, but generally anger, especially when we get caught up in the anger stuck in the anger, it usually has to do with people or relationships. Sometimes with ourselves, we have wonderful relationship with ourselves sometimes. And that can be anger there. Sometimes it's towards God, people who believe in God. And that's also you know, social, social social relationship then, and we have and what's interesting and so there's a great example given by each one so that Chinese poet philosopher of if you're also in a city like in a sailboat on a lake, and suddenly there's a boat that comes bearing down on you or something, it's the middle of the lake, and it runs into you. There's someone at the helm of the boat. It's common enough to get angry at that person for what you're watching and looking where you're going, you should have been paying attention. But if no one's in the boat, just drifting, then there might be some anger, how could they have left that the boat are drifting, but there tends not to be anger then and same kind of way or just a boat floating and maybe I should have been paying more attention. And so the anger does go so quickly towards the towards the people. So that example I use to point to the social aspect of it, people are involved. And that means that there's often a more complicated Evaluation judgments interpretations, ideas present, that is interpreting a situation we've all gotten angry. if a tree falls in my car, like the angry for a little while, but I'm not gonna, you know, hold resentment towards trees. But if my if my neighbor runs over my car then I might, you know, especially if it was intentional, you know, then I might have some anger for a while my neighbor you know, and that they work through that for a while and sit down and talk and have a social kind of process. to work through it. They don't sit down with a tree. So, why this is important is that often anger occurs through the filter or through the means of interpretations values that we It's not so often that anger happens, just the anger can be very quick and, and sudden, and but a lot of the anger people carry around with them and hold them is happening through a the presence of a lot of other things as well. So we can ask, and we do this in mindfulness. What else is that? What's prompting the anger? What are the conditions and causes for the anger? Not just leave it at a single thing or you just anger and that's the way it is, right? But what are the causes and conditions the wider kind of causing the conditions beliefs, ideas, feelings, motivations, events that are kind of behind all this and this being there. So it means that with anger, I think it's often useful to step back and not only learn how to be mindful of anger in the moment, but also to live a reflective life, which are using mindfulness to to explore and think remember What was going on there? And what do I believe? And? And what was present in me? How was I looking at my neighbor? What was my thoughts with my history there? How do I expect neighbors to treat each other? You know, it's a lot of things you could look at and try to understand. And not a few times in my life, has my anger gone away, when I got received new information about the situation. And I was my anger was dependent on a certain way of seeing an event. But when I found out other aspects of the event that had known, I realized, oh, there's no reason to be angry, and it goes away. So, part of this investigation, stopping stepping back and looking at the anger is being to question what is what what all is going on here to try to understand it. And, and for in Buddhist practice, one of the things we're most interested in, maybe not, there's other very important things but one of the two from the point of view of Buddhist practice itself. One of the things we're very interested in is, if I'm caught by the anger, if I'm attached to it, what is the what is the hook? What is the reason that I'm caught for it? And there might be a whole series of things that the reasons why I get caught or trapped by it or resistant to it or afraid of it or, or feel like I should act on it right away or somehow in its grip. Just being justified, being afraid,

being hurt, being threatened, or all kinds of things that come into play, when anger has arisen. And so we stop and look. So again, from the point of view of Buddhist practice, we're interested in why we're caught by it. And that's a different investigation than the investigation of who's right. Now, if you're interested in who is right, that might be important sometimes to understand that, you know, who did what and who should Apologize for something, but it has has its place. But what I found a lot of a strong kind of value in Buddhist cultures often is to first look and look and see what's, what is my responsibility

here? Or what is my, what am I doing? That gets me caught in it gets me hooked or attached to that anger. And then to understand that, and then once that's understood, then perhaps go and try to, you know, talk to the person if something needs to be addressed and in the world then address it. One of the things that one of the traps again, I think of a Buddhist practice or Buddhist culture, sometimes sometimes that I've seen is that sometimes Buddhists work too much on themselves. And which is a beautiful thing to work on oneself, but then they kind of feed your thinking All the responsibility or the least, if I just kind of figure out how to let go deeply enough and resolve this, I can just sit and be quiet, and economists and just sit there well, the heat abuse on me. So he can go too far that way, just look at yourself. But it's still for many people who aren't so deeply involved in Buddhism. That's not that's not usually not their fault. So, I just made this little warning, you know, there's a very important place for engaging the world. So I wanted to ask you some questions about anger, and see if we can get a list of interesting interesting lists that others what are some of the reasons both healthy and not healthy? why someone might believe it's not okay to be angry or to express the anger What are some of the reasons?

So to be angry can inflict injury into harm to others. So therefore it should be important. It's important not to act on the anger to express it. Okay? Other reasons? Yes.

In my family, expressing my anger is like opening Pandora's box to everything else that's going on wrong in the family. So you wouldn't want to express anger because you wouldn't want express anger because then you have to take in everything else. So much more follows in and it's dangerous. It's frightening. It's challenging. It's time consuming. It's loud. Okay, good. So just like a simpler, you don't get angry. Yes.

Home is a precursor to violence.

Work is considered unprofessional and non productive. So at home, there's a possibility of violence if anger is expressed as work it seems to be non productive. Okay? It could have some unhealthy effects like raise blood pressure, you know, things like that over time, unhealthy effects of blood pressure, a variety of things can happen there with unhealthy people like me, oh, if I'm, if I get if I express my anger then people won't like me. And so that was, you know, as I've told many people here before I was in big challenge for me for a while was I have had a neurotic obsession that everyone liked me. And life is really hard if you want everyone to like you. And so, so. So I guess that would be some kind of fear, right fear that people won't like me if I express the anger. I get rejected and I have no friends. So stay home alone. Yes, please. So expressing anger reinforces the anger and it can get stronger and bigger create a habit of anger it can create a real situation maybe wasn't a meal to begin with is your imagination and then now it's a full book, full blooded war.

Nice and good little children, boys and girls just aren't angry.

So if you're going to be a good person worthy person, a nice person acceptable person in the eyes of our society, and then you wouldn't be angry. Yeah, okay, well, Mary here and then we'll go back

along those lines. I think that when the little girls in particular grow up I think women in particular are socialized to be Sylvie nice and sweet and expressing anger runs counter to that. So little

girls when they grow up are still socialized to be sweet and not express that anger back here somewhere Yeah, I might embarrass myself. Might you might embarrass yourself

Yeah, get angry about something right don't know everything that's going on and a storm in I'm all angry and I look like an idiot. Okay.

Sorry.

Interesting. So you're afraid that you will regret what you do so you blurt something out. So that holds the anger back then. So if you if you knew that you could be really skillful and how you express your anger, so you would never have any regrets, then maybe you would do it.

Okay?

Yes, please.

Um, my understanding is that in Buddhism, it's not so much whether it's okay or not to be angry, but the simple fact that if you're angry, you're, you're suffering.

So that might be suffering involved with anger. And that's a good point. So but so if there's hostility, then I think there's suffering but sometimes there's, you know, the fear snow. You know, it's not so pleasant actually at home sometimes when I tell my son no You cannot play with the matches. And, you know, sometimes you know that hasn't been been the thing to do but sometimes that's the kind of fear seems that a pleasant for me, but it's not my it's not a it would be wrong for me to avoid that discomfort just because it's uncomfortable. Anyway, it's a good point. I'm just I'm just kind of went off on it. And tangentially. So someone else? Yes, please. So fear of losing control. Yeah, fear of losing control. Fear what I'm going to do.

A follow up on that is losing control means exhausting.

So, so losing control and exhausting one's energy source to be wiped out for days. It's pretty dramatic. One of the things to lose control of also one of the reasons some people are afraid of expressing their anger is they're not afraid of losing control. They're afraid of the others losing control and then there's huge consequences that can go on for days or lifetimes yes

if you're angry

Okay, so if you are angry it clouds your perception you don't see things as they are. Yes, Matt. You speak loudly I can

so so. So if you start acting on anger as creates momentum, or you're more likely to act on anger in the future creates a habit or tendency, tendency disposition. Yeah.

Um, I my way I don't I sometimes don't do it because I feel like it doesn't work. And

and in not only does it not work, but

it just feeds the whole, like, I mean, I get caught in this thing where I'm the angry person and it kind of I feel like it feeds the whole system. And if I act that out, then it just, you know, it just kind of reinforces the whole the whole, you know, you ecology of the situation. Great.



Thank you. And so if I may say when to say so sometimes I've had this strong voice at home strong, no, you know, that maybe a little bit too much so and I didn't realize it until it would sometimes had a strong note to my older son and then I realized it was effective. So it didn't work. But then, at some point like, a few weeks later, my younger son tried to use the same voice, his brother. And I realized, um, no. Yeah, it might work in the moment, but look at the consequences down the line. And that's one of the problems sometimes anger can be effective in the moment. But sometimes it says tremendous cost that is not worth it in the long term.

Yes, so so I just wanted to follow that up with, like, I feel like anger can be good in identifying that there's an issue or a problem. But taking a step back and not letting it overpower you, which I think meditation can help with can give you a way of finding a solution and finding a way of expressing that to someone else without overpowering them without anger or like, making them like retaliate. And just like also realizing you might have your own issues, but other people also have theirs. Trying to act in compassion with that. Yeah,

beautiful. And I think it's, I think it's a useful attitude or policy towards anger is that anger is always a sign of agreements, of agreements. And as what well, agreement, fear of agreement speak, you know, so, or say that a different way. I think it's a useful policy, I find, to always see anger as a signal. And it might not be might be a wise signal and might be not wise and might be based on something real like based on something imaginary. But it's always a signal that deserves attention. So if it's real, if the threat is real, or there are the hurt or the injustice is real, then we can investigate and see it better. If If what's being threatened, is are you narrow, self centered, egotistical image of ourselves You know, how could they have threatened me that you know, that you know? So, you know, so we can get angry. But it's a signal that not so much that we need to understand or write something in the world. But rather it's a signal that we have to look more deeply into ourselves, what are we holding on to what are we attached to? So, if I may, I think it would be so important I want to kind of say it again, in my words, is that I think it's usually useful to think of anger is always a signal as a symptom that deserves our attention. So this idea of switching from being caught by the anger to investigating the anger with respect and care is a very important thing. And not to assume automatically that the anger is bad or wrong. I would suggest that the approach of mindfulness is not to judge the anger. Is it good or bad or should it shouldn't be there or should be there, but to really look at it One of the skills of mindfulness is hopefully the skill of learning how not to be caught by the anger or pushed around by it. So you maybe look from the outside maybe you could stay kind of calm or collected a little bit from presence of mind. So you're not going to act on an unwise ways. But so that you can look at it more carefully than it was some someone else that's why their hands Yes.

Switch.

Yes.

Well, first thing is you have to want to and you have and you have to and you have to fly and you have to want to enough because you can kind of want to but Demand really wants to do something else, throttle the guy. So you have to want to, and that counts for a lot. And then asking the question, What's going on here? And be curious, just ask that question and kind of look whatever way you can. And it's helpful. One of the things that I find it's over and over in many situations useful is to come back into the body and explore How's it feel in the body, because the body is not a story. The body is in a kind of a kind of more present moment experience of it. And there's a lot of information in the body that's present moment time and what's going on. It helps us to kind of ground ourselves in the body and not be so caught in the thoughts and ideas. Chances are that if you're angry, that really kind of caught up in some

something cognitive, some ideas. So the body can be a great kind of supports come back and feel here. But the story we make is also important. So sometimes we need to kind of spend some time with the ideas, the story, the beliefs that are operating. And so how do you engage those without, without being lost in them and caught up in them? And sometimes, you know, making it inventory. What do I believe here? I believe x 123. Just to kind of make me an inventory creates a little bit more distance from it than actually living in the beliefs. exploring what some of the other emotions that are present might be helpful, what other what else is going on here? So for example, I think of resentment as a variation of anger. I think a resentment is frozen anger. So meaning we're kind of locked in on it. But I think so oftentimes resentment comes with other emotions as well. And the recipe of what what do you have to what ingredients that have mixed together to make resentment? And sometimes I've wondered whether it also requires you know, a sprinkling of sadness and fear and anger together perhaps. And they probably other things as well. self righteousness. So some things. So what are some other reasons why a person might not feel it's okay to be angry? Yeah,

I think sometimes expressing anger. Some may seem unfair to some people because they don't feel it's unpleasant. And they don't feel like they have any responsibility, you know, and experience that unpleasantness because they have no role in your anger.

So it can be experienced as unfair by other people. And then a little bit kind of somewhat connected to that is sometimes people are afraid of their own anger because they're afraid that they're going to roll over other people. afraid if I'm, if I'm angry, I'm not only going to hurt people, but I'm going to dominate people in a way that is frightening. And what are they interesting phenomena I've seen is that the people who have told me that some of the most common people who tell me that they're afraid of their strength of their own anger, they're afraid they're going to dominate people or something like that. I tend to be people who on the surface is at least seem to me very timid. And so I don't know, I don't know exactly what the connection is. But yes, please.

I fear that,

that my anger will only be seen at the symptom as the emotion. And that's so when I'm angry. I won't be seen for what it is that for me for what it is that I'm trying to say that it'll just be the anger, the emotion that's focused on

Beautiful, beautiful so people, people will focus on the emotion and not look at the real issues that get distracted by it and say, you're just being emotional. You know, and it just dismisses you like that guilt. disrespected. Great. That's a very important point. Yes.

I get angry.

I get angry my boss I might, he might fire me. Yes.

So so if we're angry we show our weakness and that wasn't strong enough to overcome it and so it's we don't want to show ourselves being weak. So we'll show an exterior that we're fine It's nothing no problem at all. Well it's inside. For fuming

Yes.

Anger can be cathartic and they can be a lot of sadness and other painful feelings underneath. So you might be afraid of whatever it is that anger will unleash that's underneath.

So once you turn to the anger and look at it and either release it or investigated it isn't just the family. Like I said the family dynamics has Pandora's box opens in the family, but it might be your Pandora's box, deeper, deeper feelings and emotions too hard to look at. If

you're only asking, Why don't express.

I was interested in explore the reason I asked the question was interesting. I was interested to find out what the inhibitions were from people have in feeling anger. And so I said Both goes to healthy and unhealthy versions. So we got a whole range. I was actually most interested in the unhealthy reasons why people hold back or inhibit their emotions. And maybe I should have asked just that. But I thought maybe that I decided maybe it's better to hear the whole range of interesting. Expressing feeling well, did I put my mind in my mind it was okay. Okay.

Should we feel it? And so, one of the reasons why I asked the question also, is what's a little bit of my mind and is that in that is a social emotion. how society treats its members affects how people get angry and how people feel about their anger. And one of the phenomenons in all societies that I've been seeing around is that sometimes the people have reasons to be angry, they'll have relatively innocent reasons to be angry mean like, you know, people treat each other pretty bad. So people who are kind of the oppressed, if they express anger, they're told, oh, it's your problem. You have a problem. You're the one who's kind of, you know, crazy or off or something. And so then they get marginalized even more for it. And so it gets harder and harder to express it until it gets bottled up and gets quite strong. And it's something to look at them and say happens in families. It happens in communities, it happens in societies. It happens to be Between all kinds of people, and sometimes you see in societies where the people who are oppressed are sometimes will turn around and oppress others. And so what is the social role of social beliefs and, and what's the suit was to look at society as a whole, I think is a very important part of anger. And that was kind of what was behind why I want to give this talk and I didn't say it very well here. But but that in, you know, there's very strong tendency in Buddhism to look at anger as a practice issue that we look within ourselves and investigate ourselves in some deep way. But I think that is also very important to look at what goes on in interpersonally. between people and groups in society, to to actually notice the injustice that's there to notice what's wrong who's being oppressed. that people have incense good cause to be angry. Maybe anger is not a useful way of writing the wrong. But it's helpful to stop and look at it and respect it. So like it so that people aren't dismissed for how they are. That when other people are angry, that that's also a symptom or a sign or signal that something needs attention. And then if it were part of the system where someone's angry, to offer our respect. I know their whole approach to tonight that I thought about was not to talk about anger, your anger, but to talk about mindfulness, and being on the receiving end of anger, which I think would have been a very interesting topic. Then finally, I had one more point, and I apologize, I hope you're not angry with me for jumping around, and you know, it's such a big topic and as I was thinking about it today, I just got it My mind was swimming with all this stuff. And I thought oh, No. So the last thing I want to say is that

it's interesting to explore the role of being powerlessness with being angry, powerlessness and anger. So if in the situation you're in, you feel like you have no power, or no ability to act on it to make a change, does that tend to increase your anger or decrease it? And I suspect that it tends to more often increase it. And actually, so part of the besides will investigate anger. And so looking at it, and all the different pieces of it and the causes and conditions of it and what fuels that would, you know, adds fire to it. I think the idea that we don't know we feel powerless. We don't know what to do. We can't effectively institute a change is a very important part of why people get angry. If people knew Oh, if I



just said x. They're all good. Find, you know that much, often not so much cause or reason to be much very angry. But because we feel powerless with ourselves we're angry with ourselves angry with her family, angry with our society angry with the government anger, whatever. And they say of powerlessness is a very important one to look at, and understand in this regard as well. So, in these two talks I've given about anger. One of the many points one of the points I'd like to repeat as I end now, is we want to respect our anger. And, and not nothing, they have good anger and bad anger is not so helpful. Healthy anger and unhealthy anger is a help helpful point of view. But even if it's unhealthy, it deserves our respect and respect comes from the Latin pop parts of the word meaning to look again. So may you learn how to look and in the looking, be free of the anger. Thank you